

Cascadia Wildlands

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To: House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
From: Josh, Laughlin, Cascadia Wildlands
Date: March 30, 2011
Re: testimony on bills affecting gray wolves in the 76th session

Dear Co-Chairs Jenson, Clem, Cowan, Johnson and Committee:

My name is Josh Laughlin. I'm the Campaign Director of Cascadia Wildlands, a non-profit conservation organization based in Eugene that represents approximately 5,000 members and supporters, most of whom reside in Oregon. Cascadia Wildlands and our members are heavily invested in the recovery of gray wolves in Oregon. We were closely involved in the formation of the stakeholder-created Oregon Wolf Plan that was adopted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission in December 2005. We regularly engage both federal and state agencies that oversee management of gray wolves in Oregon. This past fall we worked to help update the Oregon Wolf Plan by recommending changes to the plan to make it work as was intended. Many of our suggestions were considered and implemented.

Prior to their systematic eradication, gray wolves were found throughout Oregon. Due to widely held beliefs that wolves and humanity could not co-exist, government agents and bounty hunters killed off the last wolf in Oregon in 1947 through an extermination program.

Over the past 10 years, wolves have been slowly dispersing into Oregon following the reintroduction of 66 gray wolves into the central Idaho wilderness and Yellowstone National Park in 1995 and 1996. Today, two (possibly three) packs of gray wolves are known to roam eastern Oregon's wildlands and are made up of approximately 23 individuals.

The Oregon Wolf Plan outlines modest recovery goals across both eastern and western Oregon, which were subject to significant discussion and compromise amongst stakeholders involved in its creation. Many of the bills in front of the committee today would undermine the integrity of the widely supported Oregon Wolf Plan that just went through its mandated five-year review. During this public review process, minor changes were made to the plan by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission to clarify any gray areas.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on the bills affecting gray wolves in Oregon during the 76th session.

A. HB 3013 and HB 3560: Establishes a compensation and cost-sharing program

We generally support appropriate compensation and conflict reduction legislation as it parallels with what was called for in the Oregon Wolf Plan, with the caveats that it: (a) should not include coverage for missing cattle, which is far too broad and will exhaust any compensation fund immediately; (b) should not allow for depredations to be confirmed by Wildlife Services, which is in direct conflict with the Oregon Wolf Plan's mandate for depredations to be confirmed by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife during Phases 1 and 2; (c) should require an application process for nonlethal deterrent funding that is overseen by ODFW that authorizes payment for new and effective nonlethal deterrents implemented to reduce wolf depredation conflicts; (d) should require a claimant undergo a grazing practice analysis to ensure best animal husbandry practices are being utilized if a claim is filed; and e) should not cover sporting dogs. If a wild animal is hunted with sporting dogs, the owners should recognize the risk they are putting their dog into and should not be compensated if it is killed by a wolf.

We believe a fair livestock compensation program and a program that assists livestock producers with non lethal conflict reduction techniques will help build social tolerance for wolves in Oregon as the species begins to recover. *For this, we believe a compensation and cost-sharing program, with the caveats listed above, should be supported.*

B. HB 3561: Reduces the Oregon Wolf Plan recovery population objective to four breeding pairs of gray wolves as a threshold for delisting

The Oregon Wolf Plan clearly articulates the recovery objectives for gray wolves in Oregon prior to delisting from the state Endangered Species Act. The population goals in the plan were a result of significant discussion and compromise amongst stakeholders during a multi-year process, including livestock producers, conservation groups, hunters, and others.

For recovery purposes, the Oregon Wolf Plan divides the state into the eastern and western recovery areas and outlines a population objective of four breeding pairs of gray wolves that breed for three consecutive years in order to be considered for delisting. This bill does away with the east/west recovery areas and would effectively cut in half the wolf population required for delisting. *This bill greatly undermines the stakeholder-created Oregon Wolf Plan and should not be supported.*

C. HB 3562: Authorizes a person to kill a gray wolf in certain situations

This bill authorizes that a person may kill a gray wolf in defense of the person's own life or the life of another person. However, defense of one's life is already allowed under the Oregon Wolf Plan as outlined below.

“Lethal take may be initiated under the following circumstances: threat to human safety, to stop a wolf in the act of attacking a domestic animal or to stop chronic wolf depredations on private or public lands.” (updated Oregon Wolf Plan 2010 at 114)

“Specifically, such a management regime generally will prohibit take of wolves, except as authorized by the Commission for damage and human safety.” (updated Oregon Wolf Plan 2010 at 27)

There is no reason to legislate something that is already permitted under the Oregon Wolf Plan. This bill appears to only to foment fear of wolves within the public. *As such, this bill should be opposed.*

It should also be noted that there are only two documented cases of human fatalities attributed to wolves in North America over the past 100 years, one in Alaska and one in Canada.

D. HB 3563: Allows a person to take a gray wolf in certain situations without cause and without a permit from State Fish and Wildlife Commission

This bill allows a person to kill a gray wolf without cause and without a permit from the State Fish and Wildlife Commission if a gray wolf is within 500 feet of the residence of the person. The bill also permits a person to kill a gray wolf without a permit from the commission if the gray wolf is chasing, harassing, wounding or biting livestock, pets, working dogs or sporting dogs.

The Oregon Wolf Plan was developed with extensive participation and compromise by diverse stakeholders. Approving measures such as these would undermine the entire multi-year planning process, and the approval of that process by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission. Similar changes were proposed by the livestock industry and ultimately rejected by the Commission during the 5-year review of the Oregon Wolf Plan in October 2010. Additionally, this bill would cause harm to the recovery of wolves in Oregon by reducing recovery numbers, cutting wildlife managers out of the decision-making process, making poaching laws effectively unenforceable, and making it easier to kill wolves. *This bill greatly undermines the stakeholder created Oregon Wolf Plan and should not be supported.*

E. In sum

We believe that for wolves to successfully recover in Oregon as outlined by the Oregon Wolf Plan, *proactive* efforts to reduce wolf/livestock conflict must remain a

priority. Conservation organizations, wildlife biologists and some ranching interests are working to implement proactive measures to reduce potential wolf-livestock conflict. Efforts such as educating ranchers about eliminating wolf attractants on the range by burying livestock carcasses and bone piles are underway. There is a collaboratively-funded position for a Ranger Rider to patrol the backcountry areas where livestock are known to be near wolves. Electric fladry, or flagging, is another non-lethal deterrent currently being employed by wildlife agencies around livestock herds. Proactive solutions like these will be critical to reduce wolf-livestock conflict as wolves continue to recover across Oregon.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide our testimony today.

Best regards,

/s/

Josh Laughlin
Campaign Director